



How to Become a Certified USDA Vendor

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Good Morning and thank you for joining us today! My name is Diana, and I am one of the two new vendor and small business specialists for Commodity Procurement Program within Agricultural Marketing Services at the U.S. Department of Agriculture or USDA.

Today my counter part, Andrea and I will be presenting on how to become an approved vendor for the USDA Foods Program.

What is Commodity Procurement?

Each year, we purchase over \$3 billion in American-grown food. These purchases support American agriculture and feed millions of school children, families, and other qualified individuals through USDA's nutrition assistance programs and international food aid programs.

AMS purchases over 300 different products including:

- Beef, pork, turkey, chicken, fish, and eggs
- Fruits, vegetables, beans, and tree nuts
- Dairy, grain, and oilseed products, including peanut butter



So, let's first begin with what this Commodity Procurement Program is all about.

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Services or AMS purchases over \$3 billion of American-grown food in various forms and pack sizes from livestock, poultry, fruits, vegetables, dairy, grain and oilseed. These purchases not only support American agriculture but feed millions of school children, families, and other qualified individuals through USDA's nutrition assistance and international food aid programs.

All the products we purchase must be 100% domestically produced and processed. Supporting American agriculture is central to our program mission, so AMS will only purchase products which can be sourced domestically. We purchase truckload quantities for delivery to destinations and the commodities we purchase must be available in sufficient volume to meet the needs of national programs.

Now, let's go more in depth into learning the process of becoming an approved vendor.

Get Started: 7 Steps

- 1. Review AMS Master Solicitation - contract clauses, provisions, and requirements**
- 2. Review Product Specifications to determine what you can supply**
- 3. Get Administrative Paperwork Approved**
- 4. Get Technical Portion Approved**
- 5. Receive Solicitation and “Sharpen Your Pencil”**
- 6. Submit Offer in WBSCM**
- 7. Get Awarded, Perform, Get Paid**



The new vendor process can be broken down into 7 steps. We will briefly go over the AMS Master Solicitation, review Product Specifications, and what happens after you become an approved vendor. Our focus; however, will be on Step 3 and what AMS requires of our new and potential vendors and exactly what you need to do to get your vendor application approved.

Step 1. Review Master Solicitation

Resource: AMS Master Solicitation

Link: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/solicitations>

The Master Solicitation for Commodity Procurements contains things like:

- **Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) Clauses & Provisions**
 - e.g., (<https://sam.gov/content/home>), Small Business Subcontracting Plans, Prompt Payment Act
- **Ag. Acquisition Regulations (AGAR) Clauses & Provisions**
 - e.g., Domestic Origin/Traceability
- **AMS Policies**
 - Plant Surveys; GHP/GAP; Food Defense Plans/Audits
 - Grading/Inspection/Certification
 - Use of the Web-Based Supply Chain Management (WBSCM) System
 - Transportation and Delivery Requirements
 - Invoicing, etc.

The “AMS Master Solicitation for Commodity Procurements” is the main body of every contract awarded by AMS. It details the Federal Acquisition Regulation commonly referred to as FAR and includes clauses and provisions governing federal procurements such as financial capabilities, small business subcontracting, pre-bid certifications, product traceability, and more. This is the contract document, please know what it says and be aware that by submitting an offer to AMS, you are confirming that you meet all the requirements laid out in this Master Solicitation—read it, understand it, and if you have questions, please contact the Contracting Officer to receive clarification.

Additionally, you will notice throughout this presentation that we list in red the FAR clauses that support why we request certain items for your vendor application package.

Step 2. Review Product Specifications

Resource: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food/product-specs>

Specifications are referred to as “Commodity Specifications” or “Commodity Requirements Documents” or “Technical Requirement Supplements”

(All are linked to on the above “Product Specs” page)

- **USDA Specifications include things like:**
 - Product Descriptions
 - Grades/Standards; Commercial Item Descriptions (CIDS)
 - Harvest/pack season – current production
 - Formulation/Fabrication requirements (fat, sodium, sugar)
 - Packaging/packing/labeling
 - USDA inspection, grading, and/or auditing requirements
 - Food Safety Requirements for Suppliers; Good Agricultural Practice/Good Handling Practice Audits
 - Review any amendments to the specification



A good way to find out if Commodity Procurement is a good fit for your company is by thoroughly reviewing the USDA Commodity Specifications. These are located on our website. It is critical that you understand the technical requirements before you begin the new vendor process.

USDA takes product integrity very seriously, and we expect that our vendors supply product that consistently meet the quality and safety expectations of our customers.

The specifications detail technical requirements for the product and production, including raw materials, formulation, packaging and packing, inspection and certification requirements, and much more. These detailed specifications ensure USDA gets the same quality end-product under every contract, regardless of which supplier is awarded. Sometimes, we make changes to our technical requirements for our products. These are called amendments, which we link under the specification. Please take the time to review any associated amendments included with the product specification.

New Vendor Qualification Requirements Checklist

| | | |
|---|-----|------|
| DUNS: | | |
| Material Code/Product (See Attachment B) | | |
| Contact Person: | | |
| Address: | | |
| Email: | | |
| Phone Number/Fax | PH: | Fax: |

| I. Administrative Requirements | Received |
|--|--------------------------|
| System for Award Management (SAM): https://sam.gov/content/home | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Small Business designation and certificate <i>(if applicable)</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

While you may not be able to see it well on the slide, I would be remiss if I didn't mention the new "New Vendor Qualifications Requirement" Checklist. This checklist has been revised to include all of the administrative and technical requirements needed to become approved. It also includes two addendums: a list of products and material codes that Commodity Procurement purchases and a Directory for the various program areas you will need to contact to schedule any audits or inspections needed to fulfill the technical requirements.

To receive a copy of the checklist, please email the New Vendor email: NewVendor@usda.gov.

Now that we've gone over Steps 1 and 2, ~~I'm going to have my counterpart, Andrea,~~ **we are going to** delve more into the administrative process of becoming a vendor.

Step 3: New Vendor Administrative Application

“Qualifications Requirements for Prospective Contractors”- Responsible Prospective Contractor’s Documentation (FAR 9.104-1 and FAR 9.104-3)

- ✓ System for Award Management Registration (<https://www.sam.gov/SAM/>), in accordance with FAR Part 4.11
 - ✓ Notarized Letter
 - ✓ SAM HelpDesk: 1-866-606-8220 Option 1
 - ✓ Business Status-www.sba.gov
 - ✓ Help Tab on SAM
 - ✓ [Procurement Technical Assistance Centers \(PTACs\)](#)
- ✓ WBSCM Vendor Registration Form

Step 3 focuses on the Administrative paperwork, which begins with the System for Award Management or SAM. SAM is a Federal-government-owned and operated free website. Every vendor who wants to participate in a federal government procurement must be registered in SAM. You can also register your company in SAM as a small business, service-disabled veteran owned small business, HubZone or 8(a). Please note that if you are interested in receiving Small Disadvantaged Business, HUBZone, or 8(a) certifications, you will need to refer separately to the Small Business Administration to complete that process.

While SAM registration is only needed to be done once, you must update or renew your registration annually. There is no fee to register your company into SAM. This system is **free**, so please be aware of similar systems that will charge a hefty fee. If you run into some trouble registering in SAM, there is a Help Tab on SAM’s main page, which features FAQs, User Guides, and Helpful Hints. You can also contact the SAM HelpDesk: 1-866-606-8220. **And select option 1.**

A great contact to help you register your company in SAM are Procurement Technical Assistance Centers or PTACs. PTACs provide free counseling and training for vendors

that want to do business with the government. If we go to the PTAC website, you will see that PTACs are located all over the country.

One of the great things about PTACs is their free help with SAM registration, they even have a webpage highlighting their assistance with SAM, general tips, and videos.

Next in your package is the WBSCM vendor registration form, which is needed to create a user-profile and grant access to the WBSCM system once you are approved as a Vendor. Please select only one commodity group on the form as there is a new vendor probationary period where a new vendor is only awarded up to ten truckloads in their first contract.

Step 3: New Vendor Administrative Application

“Qualifications Requirements for Prospective Contractors”- Responsible Prospective Contractor’s Documentation (FAR 9.104-1 and FAR 9.104-3)

- ✓ Company Letter certifying capability to perform

- ✓ Three (3) Letters of Reference

- ✓ No need to submit financials, as a Contractor Responsibility Assessment (CRA) Report will be pulled
 - ✓ CRA Report pulled from FedDataCheck
 - ✓ Company must be registered in SAM and have an Unique Entity Identifier (UEI)

You must also include a company letter certifying the company’s performance, telling us about your company and what products you are interested in selling to the USDA. Your letter should include a brief history of the company, mention of satisfactory record of integrity, business ethics and list the material code, pack size, and your company’s capacity on the letter. The material and material code can be found on the Commodity Procurement website on the Purchase Programs: Awards and Solicitations webpage. The letter must be signed and on company letterhead. A sample letter can be provided upon request.

We will also need three letters of references from satisfied customers on letterhead, signed with a phone number and address for verification purposes, and a statement mentioning how satisfied your client was with the product(s) or service(s) you sold them. A sample letter can be provided upon request.

For determining contractor responsibility, the Contracting Officer will pull a Contractor Responsibility Assessment Report or CRA from FedDataCheck. A vendor must have a Unique Entity Identifier and must be active on SAM to pull the CRA report, which is why it is ESSENTIAL for your company to be successfully registered in SAM.

An important reminder is that we require the legal company name on every piece of documentation. Your legal company name should match the company name registered with your state. And you can verify your company name by visiting your secretary of state's website.

Step 3: New Vendor Administrative Application

“Qualifications Requirements for Prospective Contractors”- Responsible Prospective Contractor’s Documentation (FAR 9.104-1 and FAR 9.104-3)

If you are a non-manufacturer, you will also need to provide:

- ✓ Supplier Letter
- ✓ Complaint and Dispute Resolution Proposal

Before becoming approved, your supplier must meet our technical requirements.



If you are a non-manufacturer, we will require some additional information from you. Non-manufacturers that use suppliers or manufacturers must submit a supplier letter. This is a letter from the manufacturer and supplier stating it is willing to provide product that meets the commodity specifications. The letter must be on your supplier’s letterhead and include the material code and description of the product. The letter should be signed by both you, the non-manufacturer, AND your supplier.

Non-manufacturers will also need to submit a Complaint and Dispute Resolution Proposal Agreement. This is an agreement between yourself and your supplier that, should something happen to the product, for example, if we need a replacement or reimbursement, then the proposal will list out what both parties have agreed to do in order to resolve the issue.

Step 3: New Vendor Administrative Application

- ✓ Application sent to New Vendor Specialists at NewVendor@usda.gov
- ✓ Approving Contracting Officer (CO) will pull a CRA report
- ✓ Application then sent to AMS CO for approval
 - ✓ May require additional information such as: FDA Registration, Food Defense Audit Plan, PDFs of product labels

Once you've gone down the list and checked each item off, please send in the completed administrative paperwork via email at NewVendor@usda.gov. We process all new vendor applications and work with the approving Contracting Officer in reviewing the vendor qualifications.

After the administrative paperwork package is submitted to the approving Contracting Officer, they will pull a CRA report in FedDataCheck to determine contractor responsibility.

If any documents are missing or incomplete, we will inform you via email or phone. So please make sure your contact information is current and correct.

Step 4: Technical Requirements

- ✓ Please make sure your company has passed the necessary inspections, food defense audits, and plant surveys prior to submitting a bid.
- ✓ Contact information for AMS Auditing Services, AMS Inspection Services, and links to our product specifications, etc. can be found on our New Vendor Qualification Checklist.
- ✓ Remember the vendor must contact the Program Area to schedule audits and inspections.

Once your administrative paperwork has been submitted, you will receive an email from the Senior Contracting Officer. The email will detail that your paperwork is being reviewed, and you will now need to complete the technical requirements for your commodity.

Please note, it is the vendor's responsibility to contact the respective program area to schedule any audits or inspections, and all requirements must be met PRIOR to the bid opening date.

AMS Auditing and Inspection point of contacts are listed in the New Vendor Checklist.

Next Steps

- ✓ Your WBSCM Vendor Registration form will be uploaded
- ✓ Receive an email from the WBSCM Support Branch
 - ✓ Fill out excel user registration
 - ✓ Please review the “WBSCM CVA-Roles and Responsibilities” document
 - ✓ Links to WBSCM training on how to submit a bid
 - ✓ WBSCM HelpDesk:
WBSCMAMSHelpDesk@usda.gov
- ✓ Sign up for GovDelivery in order to receive notifications on upcoming solicitations, etc.



Once you have completed the administrative AND the technical requirements, you will receive an additional email from our Senior Contracting Officer stating that you are now an approved vendor.

Next, we will have the WBSCM team upload your form into the system. Once that occurs you will receive another email, this time from the WBSCM HelpDesk, asking for additional information to be filled out and submitted.

PLEASE READ THIS EMAIL! It is your lifeline into our system and if the information requested by our WBSCM team is not submitted in a timely manner, it may hold up the process for you to submit bids.

If you have any WBSCM questions or need assistance, feel free to contact the WBSCM HelpDesk: WBSCMAMSHelpDesk@usda.gov.

In the handy email the WBSCM team sends you there is a description on how to sign up for “GovDelivery.” Gov Delivery is our emailing list, and by subscribing to our email updates, you will receive information on solicitations, any specification changes we’ve made, and so on. It is the best way to stay up to date on our contracts.

If you have more technical questions or questions on the contract itself, please refer to the appropriate contracting specialist, which can be found on the bid invitation.

Points of Contact

NewVendor@usda.gov

Diana Dau David

New Vendor Specialist
Domestic Purchases: Fruit,
Vegetables, and Tree Nuts
International Purchases: Bulk
Commodities

Andrea Lang

New Vendor Specialist
Domestic Purchases: Dairy,
Grain, Oilseeds, Livestock, and
Poultry
International Purchases:
Packaged Commodities

If you have any questions on the information presented today, please feel free to contact myself or my counterpart at the New Vendor email, which is:

NewVendor@usda.gov



Questions?

And now we are going to open the floor for frequently asked questions regarding this presentation and how to become a new vendor.